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MEASURING ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHER CANDIDATES' INTERCULTURAL SENSITIVITY: A KEY ELEMENT TO FOSTER INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

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Abstract

A multicultural and global society makes intercultural communication an indispensable part of communication. As an affective dimension of intercultural communicative competence, intercultural sensitivity has drawn the attention of scholars throughout the past years. However, there is still a misperception about intercultural sensitivity with other cognitive, affective and behavioral domains of intercultural communication such as intercultural awareness, intercultural adroitness and intercultural communicative competence. Important scholars in the field define intercultural sensitive persons as those who are conscious in their interactions and accept interlocutors' ideas without judgment of their personal complexity. In this angle, English language teachers' sensitivity towards other cultures has significant meaning to make language learners better foreign language learners and speakers (Crawford, 2008). Thus, the current study aims to investigate English Language Teacher candidates' intercultural sensitivity level. In this study, ISS (intercultural sensitivity scale, Chen and Starosta, 2000) is used to measure the results of the 61 student teachers who participated in the study. Participants' intercultural sensitivity levels are analyzed in SPSS due to interaction engagement, respect for cultural differences, interaction confidence, enjoyment and attentiveness. The results show that English language teacher candidates enjoy interacting with people from other cultures and they are sensitive towards cultural differences and complexities.

Keywords: Intercultural Communication, Intercultural Sensitivity, Culture, English Language Teachers.

1. Introduction

As the world is becoming more globalized and communication technologies make communication easier between different cultures in various settings, intercultural communication has gained more attention than before. According to Holm et al (2009) intercultural education should serve to increase one's cognitive, affective and behavioral skills. As intercultural sensitivity is an affective domain of intercultural communicative competence, the skills of domain include empathy and respect for other peoples and their cultures (Taylor, 1994). Similar to this perspective, Chen and Starosta (1996, 1998) mention that the affective part of intercultural communicative competence is related with intercultural sensitivity, which means 'an active desire to motivate themselves to understand, appreciate, and accept differences among cultures' (Chen and Starosta, 1998, p.367). Another important scholar Bennett (1984) relates intercultural sensitivity not only to the affective part of intercultural communicative competence but also relates intercultural sensitivity to cognitive and behavioral parts of intercultural communication. In other words, as Chen and Starosta (2000) state, an intercultural sensitive person has a dual identity which makes him emphatic towards different cultures and overcoming the problems of cultural denial. Research suggests that people who have higher intercultural sensitivity handle problems well in intercultural settings (Peng, 2006).

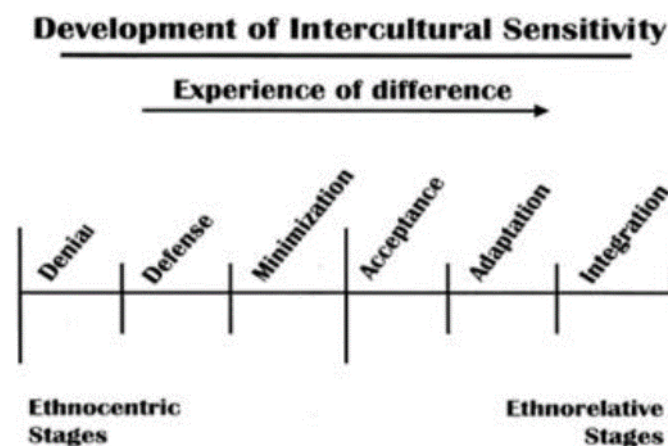
A language cannot be separated from the culture which is represented by the language. As Alptekin's research indicates, learners' language skills are improved when they express their own culture or their own experiences through their second language. However, English serves as a common language among cultures all around the world and does not belong to any single nation or country anymore (Crystal, 2008). Kramsch (1998) points out that language and culture are so elaborately related that their boundaries are blurred. Teaching a language to a language learner means opening his mind to new cultures, ways of life, and new perspectives together with linguistic features of language (Çetin Köroğlu, 2013). Foreign language teachers have a very significant role to open their students' minds to other cultures and prepare them for intercultural communication. Contents of teaching materials affect foreign language learners' attitudes towards different cultures. Alptekin (1993) states that most textbook writers are native speakers who are consciously or unconsciously conveying the values, beliefs, attitudes and feelings of their own language community. Foreign language teachers, whether they are aware or not, are so involved in cultural transmission through their material selection, such as newspapers, videos, or pictures, which all have an impact on educational basis (Duff and Uchida, 1997). However, English as a lingua franca cannot be related only to the United Kingdom and United States of America. As teachers of English, English language teachers should develop students' intercultural sensitivity. From this angle, the current study aims to determine pre-service English language teachers' intercultural sensitivity towards other cultures. The current research is guided by the following research question;

1: How do English language teacher candidates respond towards their own culture and other cultures?

2: What is English language teacher candidates' intercultural sensitivity level?

2. Review of Literature

As an important scholar whose research made great contribution to the field, Bennett developed the Developmental Model of Intercultural sensitivity (DMIS) in 1986/1993. According to Bennett, one can experience cultural difference in six stages (1986, p.182). As the model shows below:



Bennett divides these stages as Ethno centric Stages and Ethno relative Stages. In Ethno centric Stages, a person understands reality due to his own culture and ways of life. On the

other hand, in Ethno relative Stages, a person's culture is understood in relation to other cultures (Lange, 2011). Bennett explains these six stages.

Ethno centric stages are explained as (Bennett, 1993);

1. In the first ethno centric stage, denial, the individual denies the difference or existence of other cultures by erecting psychological or physical barriers in the forms of isolation and separation from other cultures.

2. In the second ethno centric stage, defense, the individual reacts against the threat of other cultures by denigrating the other cultures (negative stereotyping) and promoting the superiority of one's own culture. In some cases, the individual undergoes a reversal phase, during which the worldview shifts from one's own culture to the other culture, and the own culture is subject to disparagement.

3. Finally, in the third ethno centric stage, minimization, the individual acknowledges cultural differences on the surface but considers all cultures as fundamentally similar.

Ethno relative stages which are related with one's cultural understanding related with other cultures. These three stages are explained as follows;

1. (4) during the acceptance phase, the individual accepts and respects cultural differences with regard to behavior and values.

2. (5) in the second ethno relative stage, adaptation, the individual develops the ability to shift his frame of reference to other culturally diverse worldviews through empathy and pluralism.

3. (6) in the last stage, integration, the individual expands and incorporates other worldviews into his own worldview.

As a dynamic model for intercultural sensitivity, Bennett does not explicitly describe the role of communication in intercultural sensitivity (Snicrope et al. 2007). Chen and Starosta (1997) conceptualized intercultural sensitivity as "the ability to develop a positive emotion towards understanding and appreciating cultural differences that promotes appropriate and effective behavior in intercultural communication" (p.5). Chen and Starosta (2000) developed the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) with 24 items to measure intercultural sensitivity. The scale has five domains, which are interaction attentiveness, interaction confidence, interaction engagement, interaction enjoyment and respect for cultural differences. As Chen and Starosta (2000) state, "intercultural sensitive persons were predicted to be more effective in intercultural interactions and to show positive attitudes towards intercultural communication events" (p.11).

Education and communication are inseparable and an effective teaching-learning process requires an effective interaction (Aydın et al. 2013). In the language learning process, interaction should include significant domains such as intercultural communication. Baker states that knowledge of lexis, grammar and phonology of one language (here the case is English) are not enough for successful intercultural communication through English (2012). Besides, literature focuses on the fact that teachers have a significant role in intercultural education (Bennett, 1993). Thus, language teachers should be aware of their personal views and understanding about different cultures before they can help students to understand and develop intercultural communication (Yuen & Grossman, 2009). Important scholars state that teacher training courses are responsible for preparing teacher trainees to teach English effectively in relation to intercultural communication (Herman, 2002, & Jones, 2002). Intercultural communication has started to gain importance over the last 20 years, but related research with ELT students' intercultural sensitivity in Turkey is still quite limited. Recent

research has been carried out by Çubukçu (2013) where the researcher tried to discover the cultural sensitivity of sixty-five teacher trainees. Results show that pre-service English teachers are eager to integrate language teaching skills with culture teaching objectives. Besides, they perceive that intercultural sensitivity is significant and should be part of language teaching (Çubukçu, 2013). Research on intercultural awareness and diversity perception of English language teacher trainees was conducted by Sarıgöz (2014). The research focuses on the impact of an English Language Teaching (ELT) program on teacher trainees' understanding of intercultural diversity and awareness. The results of the study show that ELT teacher trainees deal with international and intercultural matters in language skill development. Besides, participants think that learning a foreign language develops self-reflection and self-confidence. Other research related to intercultural competence in teacher education was carried out by Akpınar and Ünalı (2014). In this study researchers compared science students and foreign language teacher trainees' intercultural outcomes of short-term study visit programs. The results indicate that there is a significant difference of understanding between the two groups.

As mentioned before related research with Intercultural Sensitivity for the Turkish context, and especially intercultural sensitivity of English language teacher candidates, is limited. However, it is possible to analyze similar research around the world. For example similar research has been carried out in the Asian context by Huen and Grossman (2009). In this study, levels of the intercultural sensitivity of three samples of student teachers in Hong Kong, Shanghai and Singapore has been investigated through Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI). The results show that the majority of participants tended to see the world from an ethnocentric perspective and tended to simplify or polarize cultural differences.

2. Method

According to Yuen and Grossman (2009), to improve one's intercultural sensitivity, the existing level of intercultural sensitivity should be known. The present study aims to measure, compare and analyze pre-service English language teachers' intercultural sensitivity level. Participants are pre-service English language teachers in Turkey from Gazi University ELT department's freshmen students. Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) was used to collect the data for the research. The scale has 0.88 alpha reliability coefficients. The ISS is a 24-item, 5-likert scale, which includes Interaction Engagement, Respect for Cultural Differences, Interaction Confidence, Interaction Enjoyment and Interaction Attentiveness. For each item in the scale, there are five options: 5=strongly agree, 4=agree, 3=uncertain, 2=disagree, and 1=strongly disagree. The participants of the study were 61 first year students of the ELT Department at Gazi University. Participants' ages range from 18 to 20 years. Participants were mostly females, at 51, as well as 10 male participants.

3. Findings and Discussion

In order to investigate student teachers' intercultural sensitivity, Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) was administered to first graders of ELT department, Gazi University. The data were analyzed through SPSS program. The researcher used descriptive statistics to analyze the data. As data collection tool comprised of various domains of intercultural sensitivity, the frequency of each item was presented in details.

3.1. Interaction Engagement

The first domain is interaction engagement which is related with participants' willingness for intercultural communication and items such as 1, 11, 13, 21, 22, 23 and 24 are related with the domain.

Table 1. *Results for interaction engagement domain*

Items	The number of choices and their percentage for each item in the factor									
	5	%	4	%	3	%	2	%	1	%
1	36	59.0	15	24.6	8	13.1	2	3.3	0	0
11	5	8.2	13	21.3	35	57.4	8	13.1	0	0
13	35	57.4	15	24.6	7	11.5	3	4.9	1	1.6
21	15	24.6	28	45.9	16	26.2	0	0	2	3.3
22	1	1.6	15	24.6	22	36.1	15	24.6	8	13.1
23	6	9.8	21	34.4	25	41.0	9	14.8	0	0
24	14	23.0	22	36.1	21	34.4	2	3.3	2	3.3

As the table presents, item 1 aims to find out participants' eagerness to communicate with people from different cultures. This item has 59.0 % 'strongly agree' and 24.6 % 'agree'. Totally, 83.6 % of the participants enjoy interacting with people from other cultures. Item 11 is related with participants' forming an impression of culturally-distinct counterparts. The item has 57.4 % 'somewhat agree' and the results show that participants tend to wait before forming impressions in communication. Item 13 questions whether participants are open towards people of other cultures and the item has 57.4 % 'strongly agree' and 24.6 % 'agree'. In total, 82 % of participants are open-minded towards people of other cultures. Item 22 questions whether participants avoid situations where they have to deal with culturally-distinct counterparts. The results of the items show that participants tend to avoid such situations. Items 21, 23 and 24 ask participants' responses to culturally different counterparts, their feelings towards differences between counterpart and participant, and understanding in communication. The results of the items show that participants enjoy realizing differences between cultures. Besides, participants have positive responses in communication. As the results point out, English language teacher candidates are open-minded towards other cultures and have positive attitudes to interaction with culturally different counterparts. Although participants did not take a culture-related course in high school, they have a positive perspective towards differences.

3.2. Interaction Enjoyment

Interaction Enjoyment domain aims to find out participants' reaction toward intercultural communication.

Table 2. *Results for interaction enjoyment domain*

Items	The number of choices and their percentage for each item in the factor									
	5	%	4	%	3	%	2	%	1	%
9	3	4.9	3	4.9	11	18	26	42.6	18	29.5
12	4	6.6	5	8.2	10	16.4	27	44.3	15	24.6
15	5	8.2	2	3.3	6	9.8	21	34.4	27	44.3

The second domain of the scale is related with interaction enjoyment. It consists of three items. Items 9, 12 and 15 question whether participants feel negative emotions during interaction with people of other cultures. These emotions are stated in items such as useless, feelings of discouragement and getting upset. Participants disagree and strongly disagree with the items in this domain. Thus, participants enjoy the interaction, are productive during interaction and have a cooperative role to carry out interaction. The results suggest that English language teacher candidates enjoy interaction with people of other cultures.

3.3. Interaction Confidence

Table 3. Results for interaction confidence domain

The number of choices and their percentage for each item in the factor

Items	The number of choices and their percentage for each item in the factor									
	5	%	4	%	3	%	2	%	1	%
3	12	19.7	24	39.3	21	34.4	3	4.9	1	1.6
4	4	6.6	16	26.2	19	31.1	18	29.5	4	6.6
5	6	9.8	14	23.0	29	47.5	8	13.1	4	6.6
6	13	21.3	23	37.7	17	27.9	6	9.8	2	3.3
10	11	18	26	42.6	18	29.5	4	6.6	2	3.3

The third domain is related with confidence in interaction. The domain is questioned with five items. Item 3 is ‘I am pretty sure of myself in interacting with people from different cultures’. This means the total of the positive responds for item three is 93 % (19.7 ‘strongly agree’, 39.3 ‘agree’ and 34.4 ‘somewhat agree’). Participants are quite sure of themselves in interaction. Item 4 questions whether or not participants find it hard to talk in front of people from different cultures. Participants agree 26.2 % and ‘somewhat agree’ 31.1 % on this item. Totally 57.3 of the participants find it hard to talk in front of people from different cultures. Item 5 asks whether participants know what they say in an interaction. The results of the item show that the majority of the participants (86.9) know what they say in an interaction. Item 6 questions whether or not participants’ are being social in interaction. Similar to item 5 results, the majority of the participants state that they can be sociable in an interaction. The last item of the domain is about confidence in interaction. The results of this item present that most of the participants have confidence in interaction with people from different cultures. According to findings which are presented above, first year students of the English language teaching department have confidence in interaction with people from other cultures.

3.4. Interaction Attentiveness

Table 4. Results for interaction attentiveness domain

Items	The number of choices and their percentage for each item in the factor									
	5	%	4	%	3	%	2	%	1	%
14	11	18.0	22	36.1	24	39.3	3	4.9	1	1.6
17	25	41.0	23	37.7	11	18.0	2	3.3	0	0
19	12	19.7	21	34.4	23	37.7	5	8.2	0	0

The fourth domain of the scale is interaction attentiveness. The domain is investigated through three questions. Item 14 is ‘I am very observant when interacting with people from different cultures’. The results for the item show that 93.4 % (18.0 % ‘strongly agree’, 36.1 % ‘agree’ and 39.3 % ‘somewhat agree’) are observant in interaction. Item 17 is related with whether or not participants are trying to get as much information as they can during an interaction. The results of this item show that 41.0 % of the participants ‘strongly agree’ with the item. The majority of the participants attentively listen and cooperate in interaction. The last item of the domain questions whether or not participants are sensitive to their culturally-distinct counterparts’ subtle meanings during their interaction. The results show that the majority of the participants tend to be sensitive to subtle meaning in interaction.

3.5. Respect for Cultural Differences

Table 5. Results for respect for cultural differences domain

Items	The number of choices and their percentage for each item in the factor									
	5	%	4	%	3	%	2	%	1	%
2	3	4.9	4	6.6	13	21.3	18	29.5	23	37.7
7	3	4.9	3	4.9	3	4.9	18	29.5	34	55.7
8	34	55.7	22	36.1	4	6.6	0	0	1	1.6
16	25	41.0	25	41.0	7	11.5	3	1.6	1	4.9
18	4	6.6	3	4.9	5	8.2	17	27.9	32	52.5
20	5	8.2	15	24.6	29	47.5	8	13.1	4	6.6

The fifth domain of the scale is respect for cultural differences. The domain has six items. Items 2, 7 and 18 present a negative attitude towards other cultures. For example, item 2 is ‘I think people from other cultures are narrow-minded’ and item 7 is ‘I don’t like to be with people from different cultures’. The results of these items show that participants disagree or strongly disagree with these items. The results indicate that participants do not reject culturally different counterparts’ opinions and enjoy being with people from different cultures. Also, participants are open to people of other cultures. Items 8 and 16 are related with respect towards other cultures. Item 8 questions whether participants respect the values of people from different cultures and 55.7 % ‘strongly agree’ while 36.1 % ‘agree’. Totally, 91.8 % of the participants respect the values of other cultures. Similar to item 8, item 16 is related with respect to culture-bound behaviors. The total of the positive responses (strongly agree and agree) to this item is 82%. The results show that the majority of English language teacher candidates respect other cultures’ values and culture-bound behaviors. However item 20 is ‘I think my culture is better than other cultures’ and the result of this item 80.2 % ‘strongly agree’, ‘agree’ and ‘somewhat agree’. As Bennett (1993) mentions, people at ethnocentric stages may perceive the world from their own cultural view. As the result for the domain present participants accept other cultures and respect their values. The results also indicate that English language teacher candidates have a shift from ethno-centric stages to ethno relative stages.

4. Conclusion

According to Koster (2005) teacher trainers are those “who provide instruction or who give guidance and support to student teachers, and who thus render a substantial contribution to the development of students into competent teachers” (p.157). As Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) is considered as the sixth element of communicative competence and the national standards for foreign language education developed in part with ACTFL (American council of Teachers of Foreign Languages) were based on ‘knowing how, when and why to say, what to whom’ language teachers’ intercultural competence and its sub-domains are quite critical to teaching a foreign language. Within the framework, the present research examined freshman students of the ELT department of Gazi University. The findings present significant results in terms of language teacher candidates’ intercultural communicative competence, intercultural sensitivity and their perspective towards cultural differences. In, conclusion English language teacher candidates have a positive attitude towards cultural differences and they respect other cultures’ values and culture-bound behaviours. As the results obtained through intercultural sensitivity scale indicate, English language teacher candidates of Gazi University, Turkey, are open-minded towards different cultures and enjoy interaction with people of different cultures. As these English language teacher candidates have high intercultural sensitivity, they will teach English without being bound to a certain nation. Besides, they can create an appropriate atmosphere for successful

intercultural communication in their language classrooms. As results show, pre-service English language teachers enjoy interaction with people from different cultures and they are eager to communicate. In addition, according to the results they are confident during the communication process in ‘third place’. The results indicate that pre-service English language teachers are open to different cultures and they accept their existence as well. Despite the fact that participants are freshman students of ELT department, their intercultural sensitivity level is quite high. The results may be interpreted as they do not have prejudice towards other cultures and ready to accept their existence. English language teachers resembles to cultural transmitter in language classrooms. In this respect, the results of current research present quite positive perspectives in terms of participants. According to another important result is that participants think their culture is superior to other cultures. This result can be interpreted that pre-service English language teachers in Turkey have limited opportunity to learn about other cultures through experience.

To sum up, as an affective domain of intercultural communicative competence, intercultural sensitivity refers to one’s desire to learn, appreciate and compare similarities and differences among cultures. The present study reveals that pre-service English language teachers who participated in current study are intercultural sensitive persons and they have the necessary capabilities to teach and use English in intercultural settings.

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